

Preparing Students for Jobs in the Financial Field

**By Kathleen Lawson, industry field coordinator
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The Financial Services Industry Cluster has just about completed its first full school year of programs and activities. The Cluster's goal for the school year was to assist with long-term workforce development by bringing businesses and schools together through career awareness and work-based learning opportunities.

Local financial services businesses and professionals stepped up to provide career information and workplace opportunities for students across the state. Fidelity Investments offered regularly scheduled tours of their Smithfield offices and job shadow opportunities to students from a variety of schools. The Amica Companies in Lincoln offered job shadow opportunities to Woonsocket High School students. Both firms participated in career fairs. The Rhode Island Society of CPAs made its members available for many types of speaking opportunities.

Based on requests from school-based coordinators and teachers, industry speakers visited schools across the state to give first-hand information about careers. In northern Rhode Island, an insurance actuary from The Amica Companies went to Woonsocket High School, a financial representative from Fidelity Investments visited Smithfield High School, an accountant from Sparrow & Company in Lincoln visited Burrillville High School, and a financial consultant from Salomon Smith Barney in Providence visited North Smithfield Junior High School.

In addition to visits to individual classes, businesses participated in career fairs. During the past school year, Lincoln High School and Smithfield High School held a combined career fair at the Lincoln campus of the Community College of Rhode Island. Many businesses participated including Lincoln Environmental in Smithfield, Vision III Architects in Providence, Nuzzo & Campion Stone Enterprises in Lincoln, and the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce. Burrillville High School held a similar event at Wright's Farm Restaurant. A cost accountant from AAi FosterGrant in Smithfield, who is a graduate of Burrillville High School and a representative from the National Association of Insurance Women participated in the Burrillville Career Fair. Cumberland High School organized its career program by designating days that showcased careers related to certain course subjects. On the day designated for math related careers, a financial adviser from Morgan Stanley Dean Witter and a representative from the Consumer Credit Counseling Service spoke to students about how math is used in their professions.

The Financial Services Cluster has made it a point to support the Academy of Finance programs at 12 Rhode Island high schools. In northern Rhode Island, Woonsocket and Smithfield participate. The programs require completion of several courses on a variety of finance-related subjects. The possibility of earning college credits while still in high school and paid student internships are elements of the programs. Nationally and locally, the vast majority of Academy of Finance graduates go on to post-secondary education.

Another initiative that is growing rapidly in the state is the Educator Externship Program. This program is a professional development activity for educators and is eligible for continuing education credit from the state Department of Education as well as graduate credit at Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island. After an orientation on identifying workplace

skills, educators spend 40 hours in a business setting working on a project, rotating through jobs or working at a single job. The workplace knowledge is used to prepare curriculum units for classroom use. Transfer of workplace knowledge to students and building business/education linkages are primary byproducts of the externships.

Last summer, the Financial Services Cluster sponsored one externship at the Center for Women & Enterprise. This summer, seven Financial Services Cluster companies have come forward to offer to host educators from around the state. Since this is a statewide program supported by several other industry clusters, it is anticipated that 60-70 educators will be taking time from their vacations to increase their knowledge of the skills needed in today's workplace.

For more information on the Financial Services Industry Cluster, please contact Kathy Lawson, financial services industry coordinator, at (401) 334-1000, x106 or lawson@nrchamber.com.

For more information on Rhode Island's other industry education partnerships, please should contact Linda Soderberg at the Department of Labor & Training at (401)462-8894.